

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	21	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 13:14	
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Christ the Lord

13. Lord's Day

Question 34. Wherefore callest thou him "our Lord"?

Answer: Because he hath redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins, not with silver and gold, but with his precious blood, and has delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus has made us his own property. (a)

(a) 1 Pet. 1:18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 1 Pet. 1:19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 1 Pet. 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 1 Cor. 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Cor. 7:23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 1 Tim. 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

It will, no doubt, come as a surprise for many people to discover that popular expressions like "ask Jesus to come into your heart" are never used as a synonym for believing. We are very prone, I think, to adopt ways of speaking about Christianity in general and the Gospel in particular that are quite foreign to the Scripture. The sad consequences of what happens when people embrace a pseudo-gospel about Jesus is illustrated by William Lobdell, a reporter for the *L.A. Times*. He describes his conversion: "In 1989, a friend took me to a Mariners Church, then in Newport Beach, after saying: 'You need God. That's what's missing in your life.' At the time, I was 28 and my first son was less than a year old. I had managed to nearly ruin my marriage (the second one) and didn't think I'd do much better as a father. I was profoundly lost. The mega-church's pastor, Kenton Beshore, had a knack for making Scripture accessible and relevant. For someone who hadn't studied the Bible much, these talks fed a hunger in my soul. The secrets to living well had been there all along – in 'Life's Instruction Manual,' as some Christians nicknamed the Bible. Some friends in a Bible study class encouraged me to attend a men's religious weekend in the San Bernardino Mountains. The three-day retreats are designed to grind down your defenses and leave you emotionally raw – an easier state in which to connect with God. After 36 hours of prayer, singing, Bible study, intimate sharing and little sleep, I felt filled with the Holy Spirit. At the climactic service Sunday, Mike Barris, a pastor-to-be, delivered an old-fashioned altar call. He said we needed to let Jesus into our hearts. With my eyes closed in prayer, I saw my heart slowly opening in two and then being infused with a warm, glowing light. A tingle spread across my chest. This, I thought, was what it was to be born again. The pastor asked those who wanted to accept Jesus to raise their hands. My hand pretty much levitated on its own. My new friends in Christ, many of whom I had first met Friday, gave me hugs and slaps on the back. I began praying each morning and night. During those quiet times, I mostly listened for God's voice. And I thought I sensed a plan he had for

me: To write about religion for the *Times* and bring light into the newsroom, if only by my stories and example.” However, as he covered the sexual abuse stories that involved numerous Roman Catholic priests and the never ending parade of charlatans on TBN he became disillusioned. He concludes, “My soul, for lack of a better term, had lost faith long ago – probably around the time I stopped going to church. My brain, which had been in denial, had finally caught up. Clearly, I saw now that belief in God, no matter how grounded, requires at some point a leap of faith. Either you have the gift of faith or you don’t. It’s not a choice. It can’t be willed into existence. And there’s no faking it if you’re honest about the state of your soul. Sitting in a park across the street from the courthouse, I called my wife on a cellphone. I told her I was putting in for a new beat at the paper.”¹ The “Gospel” that Lobdell embraced was in fact no gospel at all. Jesus was presented as someone who will help solve your personal problems and give you a meaningful life. Lobdell describes his emotions as being engaged – not his understanding of Biblical truth about his sin, God’s holiness and the Redemptive work of Christ. The mega-church that he was involved in was a typical Willow Creek clone. Sin, in particular, if mentioned at all, is down played or repackaged. Instead, as Sargeant observed, “they often frame this discussion in terms of how sin harms the individual, rather than how it is offensive to a holy God. Sin, in short, prevents us from realizing *our* full potential. As sinners, Bill Hybels (the founding pastor of Willow Creek) suggests, we break through the ‘moral guard rails’ and ‘ethical fences’ that God has established for our own good. If people would only follow God’s moral guidance, they would lead healthier, fuller lives that would culminate in eternal salvation...they are also eager to present this message without giving any unnecessary offense. For example, when asked whether ‘confrontational evangelistic programs intimidate more people than they convert,’ more than four out of five seeker church pastors surveyed (81 percent) agreed with the statement. In short, confrontation is uncivil—and ineffective. Thus, seeker church advocates are committed to developing a nonconfrontational way of presenting the Gospel. Instead of railing about eternal damnation, Hybels explains in one of his seeker messages the consequences of rejecting God: ‘You’ll miss the reward your heart yearns for, which is to be affirmed from the Father who is in heaven. You don’t want to miss His rewards. You don’t want to miss His compensations, because they’re rich. They’re soul-satisfying.’ It is just this sort of angle on the Christian faith that induces sociologist Stephen Warner to summarize the overall thrust of Hybels’s preaching as ‘upbeat.’ ‘It’s a Salvationist message,’ says Warner, ‘but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell. Rather, it’s being saved from meaninglessness. It’s more of a soft sell.’”² At this time of year, as our thoughts turn to the events surrounding our Lord’s Advent, let’s be sure that we don’t fall prey to turning the message of Christmas into the kind of distorted gospel that Lobdell accepted. We can do this by noting how Jesus addressed the subject of confessing our faith in Him.

The gospel is designed by its very nature to remove every occasion of glorying from the creature. Salvation is entirely of the Lord.

The apostle Paul had been informed that the church in Corinth was full of strife (1:11). There were two primary reasons: (1) The Corinthians had a distorted understanding of wisdom (1:18-2:16) and (2) they were equally confused over the true nature of Christian ministry (3:1-4:13). The Apostle contrasts the wisdom of this world (the kind the Corinthians were actually glorying in) and God’s wisdom as it centers on the message of the cross (1:18-25) and in terms of God’s election (1:26-31). The gospel is addressed to *sinner*s who because of sin have their minds darkened (Romans 1:21) and are in complete spiritual ignorance. We are all “under sin” (Romans 3:9). This means that sinners are under the *guilt, power, and condemnation* and eventual *doom* that sin brings. Sin *pollutes* and produces *misery*. Now since that is the condition of all mankind – who has grounds for boasting? Our text today demonstrates in a remarkable way that from beginning to end, salvation is all of grace and therefore no one can boast.

I. THE METHOD OF GRACE: GOD’S SOVEREIGN ELECTION

Three times in vv. 27, 28 Paul declares that it was God who “chose” (NIV). The word is EXELEXATO. It expands the idea of “called” in v. 26.³

A. The Fountain of Salvific Blessing. “It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus” (v. 30). Not only does the Apostle use the solemn word for election repeatedly, he spells out exactly what election means.⁴ Note the context. Paul is addressing the boasting Corinthians—the gospel of grace removes all grounds of boasting, and, on the contrary, it produces humility. This is especially the case when we come to understand the sovereign grace of God. “For my own part,” declares George Whitefield, “I cannot see how true humbleness of mind can be attained without a knowledge of it.”⁵

B. The Channel of Salvific Blessing. *All* of God’s riches are in His Son. Apart from Christ, sinners have no hope of salvation from sin and judgment.

1. HE IS MADE UNTO US WISDOM.

Our English (KJV) translation gives the impression that there are four distinct blessings listed in v. 30. But actually the Greek text reads something a bit different. There are two “ands” in this verse; the first one is the Greek word TE, the second one is the Greek word KAI, the common word for “and.” TE, however, in this context, does not convey the same thought as KAI. The NIV translation captures the actual thought here—that the terms “righteousness, sanctification and redemption” are subordinate to *wisdom* and explanatory of it.⁶ What Paul is doing here is *contrasting* the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. What is this wisdom?⁷ It has three aspects.⁸

a. *Christ Our Righteousness*

This refers *not* to ethical conduct, but is exclusively a forensic term—this righteousness is imputed or reckoned to the believer.

b. *Christ Our Sanctification*

This has reference not so much to the process of sanctification (which is an important aspect of sanctification) but with primary emphasis on its commencement. As such, it demonstrates very clearly that “righteousness” cannot be referring to our own righteousness, otherwise the Apostle would be repeating himself.⁹

c. *Christ Our Redemption*

The Greek word is APOLUTROSIS. “This particular Greek word occurs in the New Testament ten times, and every time it refers to the future, and not to the past or the present.”¹⁰ The term underscores the believer’s *deliverance* (this has a direct bearing on the total redemption, i.e., the resurrection of the body, cf. Romans 8:23) through the death of Christ on the cross, which thus furnishes the ground both of justification and sanctification.

CONCLUSION: The *Jesus* that Lobdell *asked into his heart*, turned out to be *another Jesus* – one that left him disillusioned and disappointed. Mike Brown recently addressed this by saying, “As American Evangelicalism increasingly becomes the new Liberalism and persistently preaches an alternative gospel, what else is our culture and redemption. Lines from classic Christmas carols no longer make sense to people. Consider the lyrics from hymns such as “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” or “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” “*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th’ Incarnate Deity.*” “*O Come, Thou Branch of Jesse’s stem, Unto Thine own, and rescue them! From depths of hell Thy people save, And give them victory o’er the grave.*” I mean, does your average adult in America even know what those lines mean? Worse yet, does the average professing Christian adult? When the Church loses its saltiness in the world by failing to preach the law and the gospel faithfully, what else is an affluent culture like ours to do with Christmas? It can only turn to what it knows by nature: Pelagianism, in one form or another. And world peace has always been considered obtainable to Pelagians. The corruption of the human heart (if such a thing even exists)

is a mere flesh wound that can be overcome with our reason, will-power, and acts of random kindness. Christmas, then, becomes an opportunity to evolve as the human race. And Jesus in the manger fits perfectly into this worldview. “Let’s Keep Christ in Christmas?” Who wants to take him out? Our sentimental culture looks at the manger scene and says, “Oh, I get it! Jesus is the Prince of Peace because he is so meek and mild. Look at him there in the manger. He’s not threatening anyone. He is not judgmental. He is peaceful and tolerant. If we would just remember him throughout the year and try to be more like him, the world would be a better place. What a wonderful Christmas story!” No one will argue the fact that the world would be a much better place if everyone was more like Jesus. The problem is that the human heart *can’t* be more like Jesus on its own (see Romans 1-3). The point of Christ’s coming into the world was not to provide us with moral teachings and an example of love that transcends his death and provides an opportunity for world peace. Rather, the point of his coming was to MAKE peace between us and God, to rescue sinners from God’s wrath by fulfilling the demands of the law through his life, death, and resurrection. Christmas *happened* in history because God fulfilled his promise to our first parents, Adam and Eve, to send the Prince of Peace who would crush the Serpent’s head. Really, to celebrate Christmas is to celebrate God’s fulfillment of his promise to send the Savior and Second Adam, that which the whole Old Testament is all about.”¹¹ Candidly, if the kind of “gospel” Lobdell was exposed to is the only Gospel, then Nietzsche was right. God is dead and we have killed Him. But be of good cheer, the *real* Gospel is very different and Christ the Lord reigns. He is not dead, but has conquered death by His life and death.

Christ is the wisdom of God. This embraces justification, sanctification and redemption – and note how Paul concludes this marvelous declaration. He quotes Jeremiah 9:25 – The sinner cannot boast of his wisdom, power and distinction. The grace of God will *always* humble the high-minded.

ENDNOTES

¹ *LA Times*, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jul/21/local/me-lostfaith21?pg=6>.

² K.H. Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000), p. 95.

³ EXELEXATO, aorist middle indicative, from the verb EKLEGO, to pick out, to choose. The word involves three ideas: the stem of the word indicates ‘the telling over’; the preposition in compound indicates the rejection of some and the acceptance of others; and the middle voice indicates “the taking to (for) Himself.” J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (rpt. Zondervan, 1957). The noted German New Testament scholar, H.A.W. Meyer, concurs and says that the word “always has and must of logical necessity have a reference to others to whom the chosen would, with the EKLOGA still belong.” *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians and Ephesians* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), p. 313. Kenneth Wuest, ignoring this lexical meaning of the word (and having, I think, a theological bias on this point) says, “This (election) precludes the idea that those not selected are rejected or refused salvation.” *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Moody, 1953), p. 29.

⁴ Despite the lexical and theological abundance for this doctrine, many Christians attempt to explain election away or define it (like Kenneth Wuest) so that its real meaning is lost.

⁵ Whitefield goes on to say, “and though I will not say, that everyone who denies election is a bad man, yet I will say, with that sweet singer, Mr. (Robert) Traill, it is a very bad sign: such a one, whoever he be, I think cannot truly know himself; for if we deny election, we must, partly at least, glory in ourselves; but our redemption is so ordered, that no flesh should glory in the Divine presence; and hence it is, that the pride of man opposes this doctrine.” *Select Sermons of George Whitefield* (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 98.

⁶ Cf. remarks by Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: Tyndale Series* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 50.

⁷ Note the translation in the NIV, “wisdom for us from God,” i.e., God made Him (Christ) wisdom on our behalf, cf. comments by Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), p. 85.

⁸ Note that the three terms are nouns, not verbs. They stand in opposition to the noun wisdom, cf. G. Fee, op. cit., p. 86.

⁹ Cf. the excellent article by Ronald Y.K. Fung, “Justification by Faith in 1 & 2 Corinthians,” in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*, ed. D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris (Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 246-249.

¹⁰ G. Campbell-Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul: An Exposition of I and II Corinthians* (Revell, 1946), p. 39.

¹¹ <http://michaelbrown.squarespace.com/the-latest-post/2009/12/16/which-christ-in-christm...>